

Humanist CommonSense

A NEWSLETTER OF THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA

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A CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION (AHA) AND AN AFFILIATE OF THE COUNCIL FOR SECULAR HUMANISM (CSH)

God in Government

WHEN: Tuesday September 21 at 7 PM

WHERE: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland (see, map on p. 11)

IT'S A HOT TOPIC ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL right now ... television pundits are hyping a God takeover for favored candidates ... tea party demonstrators use it as a rallying cry ... there's scarcely a reasoned or even moderate voice to break through the cacophony of righteousness.



For a short time, step away from the gladiatorial uproar and join us for an opportunity to view and discuss the history and rationality of this issue. It's movie night with a brain ... popcorn will be available as we watch the film, *God in Government*, followed by open discussion.

God in Government was produced by Independent Production Fund in collaboration with CTVC and Faith and Values Media. With video clips of Madeleine Albright, Newt Gingrich, George W. Bush, John F. Kennedy, the Rev. Barry Lynn (Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State), and many others, this film asks blunt questions: How do the views of former presidents George W. Bush and John F. Kennedy compare—or contrast? What lessons can we draw from the experiences of religion and the state in Iran, Israel and India? How do our competing religious sects view the role of God in American government?

Not a religious screed, this film takes a measured look at the intersection of American values with the far-right's push for faith-based government. Thus the question: What should we do about this conflict?

The Significance of Relics

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

[Dr. Williamson, a chapter member and longtime Humanist advocate, is a retired cardiologist currently living in Orlando. He is editor of a magazine for physicians, CENTRAL FLORIDA PHYSICIAN; has contributed articles to freethought publications; regularly submits letters to the ORLANDO SENTINEL; and has served on the boards of Humanists of Florida and Atheists of Florida. E-mail: jwingw@aol.com]

SACRED RELICS HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE in Christianity since the early second century. In many ways they exemplify what is wrong with Catholicism and religion in general. The subject of relics in Catholicism has been under-reported, and this essay will make an attempt to correct that situation.

Relics in Christianity are venerated items such as human remains of important religious figures or various objects associated with them. The human remains can be an entire body on display or just portions, such as bones or snip-pets from different areas of the body.

In the past, the promotion of relics in Catholicism became an obsession and, to non-believers, reached a high level of strangeness—at times, black or even X-rated humor. The frenzy associated with relics has abated in modern times, but they still play an important role in the religion.

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The End of the World!!!!!!

By Robert P. Tucker, Ph.D.

[Dr. Tucker, a founding member of our chapter, received his Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Chicago. He was chair of the Dept. of Religion and Philosophy, Yankton College, Yankton, SD, and former professor of Philosophy and Bible at Florida Southern College, Lakeland.]

I HAVE JUST READ Robert Brockway's enlightening, frightening and highly entertaining new book, *Everything Is Going To Kill Everybody: The Terrifyingly Real Ways The World Wants You Dead.*[5] It is an apocalyptic tour of things and events that historically altered the world forever (e.g., the great extinctions) and what currently lies in wait to end the world as we know it—and us as well. His topics include what he humorously calls “Frankencrops” (bio-engineered nightmares), increasing global human sterility, super volcanoes, megatsunamis, hypercanes, nanotech threats, planet killing asteroids, magnetic pole shifts, biotech contagions, and human flesh-eating robots run amok. All of this information is not only extremely fascinating, but also terrifyingly timely for, as he points out on page 165, according to the Mayan calendar, the

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CALENDAR

September-December 2010

September 13	Humanist Dinner
	Fred's Southern Market: Map p. 11
September 21	Regular Meeting
October 11	Humanist Dinner
October 19	Regular Meeting
November 8	Humanist Dinner
November 16	Regular Meeting
December 15	Annual Meeting



Community News

IT IS WITH SADNESS—with fond memory and appreciation of a brave and good life—that we said “Good-bye” last month to our HAWCF friend and humanist stalwart

Marcelle Jones.

Marcelle lived a giving, rational humanist life to the very end. Through the trials with her health, she still came out to our community meetings and events as often as she could ... always with a



smile on her face and a kind word to each person.

Born in New Bedford, MA, Marcelle spent her early childhood in Haiti, and thereafter spoke fluent French and Creole throughout her life. Marcie was a prolific and talented writer as well as an accomplished classical guitarist who studied under Sophocles Pappas. Having many careers in her lifetime, she traveled extensively throughout Europe from her home base in Beirut.

She was a contributing member of AmeriCorps, the Washington Guitar Society, Compassion & Choices, American Humanists Association, and Lakeland Arts groups.

In her last days, she wrote: “I am more proud of the quality of my friends than of anything in my life.” Her endless generosity culminated in her donation of her brain to the Brain Endowment Bank for research.

Dr. Tucker, her friend for many years, has written and dedicated the following

poem to Marcelle.

My Immortal Friend

In Spring, from here to there, new Life appears

And struggles ever upward towards the Sun,

Its claim on growth and joy for many years

Proclaimed as it begins its race to run. In the Summer, Life swells with pride and basks

In the warmth of its opportunities.

With Fall, completion of allotted tasks Invites new use of capabilities.

Then Winter comes and frosts the world with cold,

As if Life itself were about to end.

But such is not the case, for Life is bold! It lingers on in each and ev'ry friend.

The life well-lived, changing others, survives;

And your life, Dear One, enhanced all our lives!

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The following letter was published in THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE online on July 8, 2010. Read it and reader comments at http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/letters/chi-100708utchen_briefs_03487570.story

Can we believe in an intelligent designer?

Several letters have been printed in response to the June 17 Tribune article on “Secularists Spreading the Word To Skip Church.” Mr. Tom Quinlan of Romeoville writes that as a result of “the remarkable design of the human body or the nature of a single atom, there is an obvious, undeniable order present. And the question becomes, is it more reasonable to ascribe all this order to chaos or design, to accident or intelligence?” I myself am having a few problems with the notion of intelligent design by an omnipotent deity.

(1) What is the need for the extremes of temperature that we endure?

Do we need 90-degree days in the summers and zero and below in the winters? Perhaps we need the four seasons, but would not an intelligent designer be content with 70s in the summer and 30s in the winter?

(2) Why do we need to have unlimited free will in order not to be robots? Could we not have been given free will for everything in our lives except for committing murder, wars, rape, incest and pedophilia? An intelligent designer would have wisely limited our free will in these few respects, and this would not have turned us into mere robots.

(3) Below the surface, our earth is composed of tectonic plates, and unfortunately these shift under each other and may even break, and this is the major cause of earthquakes. Would not an intelligent designer have chosen a better design for our planet than tectonic plates?

(4) Why do we suffer from hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, floods, mudslides, and other natural disasters? If there were an intelligent designer, would he really have created these or allowed them to happen?

(5) Why do we need to have terrible diseases like cancer, pneumonia, and

others, and then have to educate and train doctors to try to cure them? Would it not have been more intelligent design not to have such diseases in the first place?

(6) One of the major unintelligent designs was the placement in males of the prostate gland around the urethra, making it difficult to urinate as we grow older and as the prostate gland enlarges and presses against the urethra. Biologists agree that it would have been much wiser and intelligent had the designer placed the prostate gland next to the urethra instead of around it, but apparently the designer just didn't think it through.

(7) One of the prime examples of chaos and unintelligent design is our curved spine. Before we fully evolved, we walked on all fours, and our backbone was horizontal and straight just under the top of our back, and it easily held all the muscles and organs suspended from it in the body. But eventually we became human and stood up on two legs, and the weight of our muscles and organs hanging from our now vertical backbone caused our spine to curve in order to support them. But

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Celebrate a New Humanist Institute: Inspired by Empathy, Creativity and Guided by Reason

BRANDISHING THIS STATEMENT OF "NEO-HUMANIST" VALUES, a group of humanist leaders has established a new non-profit aiming to re-humanize secularism.

Paul Kurtz, chairman of the new Institute for Science and Human Values (ISHV), along with other prominent humanists, has composed a NEO-HUMANIST STATEMENT OF SECULAR PRINCIPLES AND VALUES to help guide the new organization's activities. The Statement is signed by more than 100 prominent Humanists including Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, former Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, and writer Ann Druyan, wife of the late Carl Sagan. Read the statement text and the entire news release at their web site, <http://www.InstituteForScienceAndHumanValues.net>.

Commented Kurtz, "We've never had a problem expressing what we're against. Humanists have always been critical of theism. But as our movement matures politically and socially, it will be beneficial to express our positive values, like ethical values based on reason and support for critical thinking as a way to solve public problems."

OFFICERS OF THE NEW NONPROFIT ARE:

Chairman: Dr. Paul Kurtz, Professor of philosophy (emeritus) at the State University of New York at Amherst (Buffalo); founder and longtime CEO of Center for Inquiry Transnational and Prometheus Books; Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; humanist laureate and president of the International Academy of Humanism.

President: Stuart Jordan, Ph.D., Senior staff scientist (emer.) NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

Treasurer: Toni Van Pelt, congressional lobbyist; grassroots organizer; National Organization for Women Southeast Regional Director

Secretary: Norm Allen, Former Executive Director, African American Humanists

Directors: Vince Parr, Ph.D, Clinical Psychologist, postdoctorate at the Albert Ellis Institute; and Jonathan Kurtz, President, Prometheus Books



Toni Van Pelt, former director of CFI's lobbying arm, the Office of Public Policy, noted that due to humanism's significant accomplishments in petitioning Congress over the last several years, one facet of ISHV's mission is to fulfill the lobbying gap left by the effective

closure of CFI's Office of Public Policy. "We had great success, to the point where several members accepted our Science and Reason award, even speaking in our D.C. office."

Concerned by what he saw as a crisis in secularism, Kurtz was prompted to form the ISHV. "It is becoming obvious to a ... number of secularists that to be disaffected from religion doesn't bestow moral or ethical superiority. For example, Ayn Rand and her ideological heirs promote freedom, but don't consider the virtue in selflessness and cooperation. We want to investigate whether there is a moral framework reinforced by reason that non-theists can embrace."

Noting that religion is often at the root of society's ethical values, Kurtz said ISHV wants to reevaluate them on rational grounds. "We're going to enlist the brightest scientists and scholars, not just in the United States but everywhere there are humanists ... how to better develop the common moral virtues we share as human beings."

In 1991, Kurtz, already a leader in humanist, skeptical, and secularist movements, brought together two organizations—one focused on skepticism. the other on humanism—to form the Center for Inquiry Transnational (CFI). In May 2010, Kurtz resigned from CFI's board

In a recent news release, Kurtz announced that "We aim to be

inclusive ... The secularist garden doesn't necessarily produce humanist blooms. The questions we want to answer are, how do you develop among secularists a personal morality? How does one develop empathy? How can we motivate morality? It's a common belief that morality can only come from religion. Well, I have known scores of excellent human beings who behave very morally and yet do not subscribe to religious belief systems."

You can meet at and support this important effort at <http://www.InstituteForScienceandHumanValues.net/>.

LETTERS

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this curvature has caused us all kinds of backache problems and herniated disks. An intelligent designer would have designed us humans differently, would we not think?

(8) Finally, an intelligent person or designer who makes mistakes would have noticed these errors, quickly stepped in, and corrected them. If I am a foreman on an assembly line and notice that the manufacturing of a product is flawed and is not working, I would stop the line, correct the problem, and then start up again. But if the universe has a designer, that designer simply refuses to notice and correct all the errors of unintelligent design that I have mentioned above. Were he an intelligent and all-powerful designer, he would have noticed these errors, stepped in, and corrected them. But I guess he refuses to do so. So I have to conclude that there is not an obvious, undeniable order present, based on intelligent design, as Mr. Quinlan tells us, but rather the total absence of such an intelligent designer. Things came to be because they came to be, and I myself am content to leave it at that.

Theodore M. Utchen, Wheaton [IL]

In Their Own Words

That the State must be separated from the Church is a thesis absolutely false, a most pernicious error. ...

Pope Pius X, encyclical *Vehementer Nos*, Feb. 11, 1906

The Significance of Relics

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One of the most important of all relics is the Shroud of Turin, currently on display in Turin, a northern Italian city. The Shroud is thought by believers to be the burial cloth of Jesus Christ and to provide not only evidence of Christ's existence but of his divinity as well.

The 14-foot-long, 3½-foot-wide cloth has gone on public display for the first time since the 2000 Millennium



celebrations and a subsequent 2002 restoration. It is kept in a bullet-proof, climate-controlled case in Turin's cathedral. As evidence of its importance to the Catholic Church, it has drawn nearly 2 million reservations from pilgrims and tourists eager to spend three to five minutes viewing it.

The shroud bears the figure of a crucified man, complete with blood seeping from his hands and feet. Believers think the image of Christ was recorded miraculously at the time of his resurrection.

Pope Benedict XVI recently visited the Shroud and all but gave an outright endorsement to its authenticity. He should know better since scientific evidence has clearly revealed that it is a fake.

The shroud cloth has been dated to the period from 1260-1390 by carbon-dating by three independent laboratories. This time period is consistent with a fourteenth-century bishop's report to Pope Clement VII that an earlier bishop had discovered the forger and that he had confessed. The "blood" has been definitively proved to be composed of red ocher and vermilion tempera paint.

Of course, extensive independent biblical research clearly shows that there was no historical Jesus Christ. Consequently, the idea of an actual burial cloth of a mythical figure is foolish. And the sheer multiplicity of the claims of Jesus' authentic burial shrouds (at least 26) scattered throughout the abbeys of

Europe, of which the Shroud of Turin is just one, gives the lie to the claim of authenticity.

Although the Shroud of Turin is the most famous of relics currently, it constitutes only a tiny portion of the total relics that make up such an important part of the history of the Catholic Church. As cathedrals and monasteries were built throughout Europe, communities vied with each other to collect the most important relics. Many tales of miracles were attributed to relics beginning in the early centuries of the church. The popularity of these relics reached a fevered pitch in the Middle Ages, when the church forgery mill cranked out thousands of phony relics.

At first, various body parts of martyrs and saints, their entire bodies, or objects associated with them during their lifetimes were on display. When bodies of saints and martyrs were placed on display, the church often pronounced their bodies "incorruptible," a supernatural property that supposedly protected them from natural decay. Then various body parts of Jesus began to appear, even though he supposedly ascended into heaven and left no body behind. No problem. What about parts that he had shed during his lifetime? Soon abbeys and chapels were displaying Christ's fingernails, baby teeth, umbilical cord, and one of the most holy, his foreskin. Known as the Holy Prepuce, the foreskin was claimed by as many as six separate churches. Naturally, it was necessary to develop a test to tell whether the foreskin was authentic. A properly trained physician could make this determination by chewing on it.

The concept of the Holy Prepuce was treated with appropriate solemnity and awe by the faithful. St. Agnes of Blannbekin stated that every time she took communion, she imagined that it was really the Holy Cock Skin of Christ that she was chewing. Saint Catherine of Siena claimed that the ring that she wore was really a mystical form of the Holy Prepuce. In France

one of the foreskins was protected at a church in a shriveled leather pouch. The shape of this holy purse became the fashionable shape for many of the purses at that time.

Other relics connected with the life of Jesus were displayed: the crown of thorns, nails from the crucifixion, parts of the cross, the steps he walked up during his trial before Pilate.

The Virgin Mary was not left out of the relic frenzy. Vials of her breast milk were a hot commodity on the relics market. The vials became known as a cure for just about every ailment and were extensively exhibited in chapels and monasteries all over the Christian world. John Calvin wrote that "even if she had been a cow her whole life, she could not have produced such a quantity."

One of the miracles attributed to St. Bernard was that he stood before a statue of the Virgin Mary and exclaimed, "Show that you are a mother!" at which point the statue came to life and shot milk into the mouth of the saint. This event was known as the Miracle of Lactation and was the subject of numerous works of religious art.

For a cult such as Christianity to grow into a world religion, it was important to offer believers something that the natural world could not give them. That something, as with most other religions, was magical powers provided by getting in touch with a supernatural world, one that provided miracles and eternal life. And relics were tangible evidence that the supernatural world was a reality. Who could doubt that Christ was an actual historical figure when a variety of relics connected with him were available? Was there any doubt that the Virgin Mary had been a real person when numerous vials of her milk were available to be seen and touched? Who could doubt the supernatural power that this religion provided when bodies were protected from decay.

Providing evidence of the supernatural was not the only reason that the church promoted relics. The sale of relics to believers was a rich source of revenue for the Catholic Church.

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The End of the World!

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world is scheduled to come to an end in 2012—so, kick back and take it easy: we have a little time to prepare.

To calm myself after reading Brockway, I turned to poetry and, wouldn't you know it, found myself reading "The Hollow Men" by T. S. Eliot. You may recall his famous lines in it: "This is the way the world ends,/ Not with a bang but a whimper." [7]

I decided to take this as a sign that I should rethink The End Of The World!—or, as we theologians and philosophers like to call it, the "Eschaton"; and what better time could there be for doing so not merely two years before its arrival but in the year of the tenth anniversary of its nonarrival!

Though one only infrequently hears cries of "Doomsday!" right now, recall what was happening only a decade ago. There were a great many people working themselves up into a frenzy back then. All one had to do was turn on the radio or T.V., read a newspaper or a magazine, or log on to the World Wide Web to see that tens of thousands of people either expected with dread or prayed with piety that the world as we knew it would come crashing to an end in just a few months as calendars rolled over from 1999 to the year 2,000.

"Millennium Madness" is what the media called it. [6]

The "Wrath of God" is what some in the pulpit were saying.

On the secular side, it was the "Y2K Bug" that caused concern. [18:72-73] In a very short-sighted decision in the 1950s, early computer programmers chose to represent years by only 2 digits, instead of 4. That technique worked fine for decades. But as we approached the year 2,000, this old method of programming made it impossible for the machines which used it to distinguish between 1900 and 2000, since "00" could represent either. When faced with such a dilemma, old computer systems would lock-up and shut-down. Anything depending on them would stop working. Since almost everything even then was computer-operated,

the worst-case scenario envisioned the entire, modern, technological world coming to an end the first moment computers tried to read the time and date of 12:01 a.m., 2000. It was feared that developed nations would be thrown back into a Dark Age of hunter-gatherers driven into behaviors best described as Darwinian. Chaos would reign, and it would become a matter of the survival of the fittest.

In reporting on the "Y2K Insanity" [6] that sprung up in response to this computer programming glitch, *TIME* magazine's Richard Lacayo said: "To understand what it means to make your home truly *millennium ready*, you have to visit the Eckharts of rural Lisbon, Ohio. Bruce Eckhart, 44, an automation technician for Daimler-Chrysler, his wife Diane, 41, and their 11-year-old daughter Danielle are models of *apocalyptic pluck*. It's not just the gas-powered home generator they bought in case of massive power outages. It's not the year's supply of dehydrated food in their basement... *It's the water bed*. The collapse of public utilities is one of the big worries among the Y2K-anxious...people... So the Eckharts bought Danielle a water bed. That way, in a pinch, they have an extra 300 gallons on hand. Danielle is a little non-plussed. "*I hope we don't end up drinking my bed*," she says." [9:60]

There were (and remain today) many such *secular survivalists*. One of the best known then was computer theorist Ed Yourdon, whose book, *Time Bomb 2000*, was already in its 12th printing. He had moved his family from Manhattan to an adobe house in Taos, New Mexico, complete with solar panels and a windmill. [9:67]

Scores of people were moving from urban areas to remote rural outposts. Russ Voorhees was promoting a Y2K-safe community named Heritage West 2000 in Arizona's White Mountains. [9:62] Harrison, Arkansas, a quiet Ozarks farm town of 12,000 residents was also quickly becoming "a Mecca for anyone who fears the worst from the computer bug." [9:70] People there were stockpiling everything, especially rolls of toilet paper for, as one man put it, they are "good barter items." [Ibid.] Such

stockpiling was happening all over America. An example of how big an industry Y2K-preparation became was Preparedness Resources Inc. A 20-year old Utah purveyor of dehydrated foods, it went from a monthly sales figure of \$300,000 in 1977 up to \$4 million during the panic! [Ibid.]

As part of this secular preparedness for Y2K disasters, the federal government set up a consumer hotline and a website. Over 200 books were published. [CBS Evening News, 9/23/99] Even the UTNE Reader and the American Red Cross published Y2K preparedness guides. [9:68]

Of course, the really big group of people afflicted with millennium madness consisted of (and remains) religious fanatics. These folks all have "death wish fantasies" because they believe that their god is going to bring this evil world to its end, destroy their enemies, and raise them up to some higher level of power, prestige, peace and perpetual purity. [9:63]

There were (and are) as many versions of doom as there are prophets: Back then the Christian Coalition speculated that the chaos caused by the Y2K Bug would give President Clinton an excuse to seize dictatorial powers. [9:64] Pat Robertson sold a video called *Preparing for the Millennium: a CBN* [Christian Broadcasting Network] *News Special Report*, as well as a novel, *The End of an Age*, in which Armageddon is triggered by a meteor crash. [Ibid.] Retired minister Tim LaHaye and former sports writer Jerry Jenkins sold a series of novels entitled *Left Behind* which described life on the eve of the Second Coming: genuine Christians go to Heaven, while everyone else suffers wars, earthquakes and the whims of an Antichrist who turns out to be the Secretary-General of the United Nations. [Ibid.] A different Antichrist, one resembling Bill Gates, appears in the novel, *Judgment Day 2000*, by former CBN marketing director Richard Wiles. "If I'm wrong," said Wiles, "the worst that will happen to me is I'll be tremendously embarrassed. If other people are wrong and

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The End of the World!

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don't listen to me, the worst that will happen is all men will perish." (He didn't say what would happen to the *women!*) *Ibid.*] Then there was (the late) Jerry Falwell. Although he did not believe the End was near, he did cash in on Armageddon anxiety in his new book, *Y2K: A Christian's Guide to the Millennium Bug*. [9:62]

Lacayo reported that for electronic evangelists "the Y2K Bug is something akin to the original sin of technological society, a mortal flaw bred in the very bones of the modern world." [9:68] Just like Miller and Coors beers, M & M's and Mars candies, United and Alaska airlines, and over 1,400 other businesses which applied for trademarks as the "Official Sponsor" or "the Official Product of the New Millennium," most electronic evangelists were quick to take financial advantage of the profits they could make as the Official Prophets of the New Millennium. [19]

Beyond such capitalistic Christian charlatans, however, there were several much more sinister millennial mad men and women: those who believed that they could begin the final cosmic battle between good and evil by perpetrating acts of violence themselves. Several such cults existed and for many of them Jerusalem was ground zero for the Apocalypse either as its point of ignition or as the landing zone for the Second Coming of Christ. [4:67]

Also in the news back then were the followers of Denver-based Monte Kim Miller who claimed to be the Trinity. Believing he was the prophet described in the book of Revelation, who will be killed in Jerusalem and then resurrected three days later, Miller disappeared with more than 80 of his disciples in September, 1998. Then, in January, 1999, his followers, calling themselves the "Concerned Christians," began to arrive in Jerusalem to make preparations for their "Big Provocation" which was to have taken place on the Temple Mount. This, they hoped, would begin a war between Arabs and Jews that would result in Armageddon. Tipped off by the F.B.I., the Israelis arrested

and deported them almost immediately, however. [4:67]

If you think things were bad a decade ago, you should have been around 1,000 years ago! It was "TEOTWAWKI" (a popular acronym for "The End Of The World As We Know It") back then, too. In 999, Pope Sylvester II was accused of sodomy, sorcery, worshipping idols and raising the dead. The Day of Judgment was believed to be imminent. Thousands packed St. Peter's Basilica in Rome to witness the End of the World, and the entire nation of Iceland converted to Christianity! [13:23]

So, what is the reason for these outbreaks of millennial madness? Although many other religions have doctrines describing the End of the world, our Western confusion arises directly out of our Judeo-Christian heritage.

During the early part of the Old Testament period, three Hebrew traditions laid the foundations for what would become doctrines about the End of the World.

First, there was a tradition that Yahweh had promised Hebrew patriarchs that he would give their people a great land and would make of them a great nation. [15:576]

Second, there was a tradition that Yahweh had given Moses various Laws and that if the Hebrews obeyed them, they would prosper, whereas if they did not, they would be punished. [15:577]

Third, there was a tradition that Yahweh had made an eternal covenant with David that Jerusalem would forever be his capital, that David's descendants would forever sit upon the throne, and that Yahweh's home, the Temple, would last forever. [15:576f.]

All of these promises and prophecies had a future orientation and when they were slow to be actualized or when they were frustrated by historical circumstances there developed another tradition called the "Day of Yahweh." When that Day arrived the promises and prophecies would be fulfilled within human history and the appropriate blessings or punishments for obedience or disobedience to Yahweh's laws would be actual-

ized. [15:577]

When the prophets of the Old Testament arose, they reiterated the expectations of all these traditions. But as the Hebrews approached their downfall in the destruction of their nation, its capital Jerusalem and its Temple by the Babylonians who then deported them into captivity, these pre-exilic prophets became ever more gloomy in their forecast of doom. [15:577f.]

Upon being released from their Babylonian Captivity and returned to Judah, the post-exilic prophets of these people (who were now called "Jews") reiterated their hopes that Yahweh would bring an end to the old world of their sufferings, would punish their enemies, and bless them with a New Jerusalem and a New Temple. These hopes were fulfilled only to a slight degree and the Jews were left profoundly disappointed and discouraged. [15:578]

Since it no longer seemed believable that Yahweh would fulfill his promises in "this" world, a new "apocalyptic" hope arose that he might make things right in the "next" world. Historical expectations were replaced by mythological ones which held that Yahweh would destroy the entire cosmos and then create a New Heaven and a New Earth. From this point forward, the "End of the World" meant just that, literally: it was no longer just a metaphor for a drastic historical change; it was henceforth the destruction of history and its replacement by a supernatural realm. [15:578; 12:583]

Not all Jews accepted these ideas, but many did and they elaborated on them in great detail in the Jewish literature that followed the close of the Old Testament period (the Pseudepigrapha). [15:578f.] Moreover, these later Jewish writings added another new idea: in between the period of destruction which would signal the End of the old world, yet before the new creation would be actualized, there would be an interim period. It came to be called the "Millennium" (after Rev. 20:1-6) because some calculations said it would last 1,000 years. Other calculations said it would

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The End of the World!

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last different lengths of time, as few as 400 or as long as 8,000 years. Later on, when Jewish rabbis became influential, they calculated many other lengths of time, including: 40, 60, 70, 120, 365, 400, 600, 2000, 5,000 and 7,000 years.[8:832]

Then another new idea was added by still other Jewish writers: it was the notion of a Messiah.[15:578f.] In the Old Testament “messiah” referred to a human descendent of King David who would save his people from their historical problems, but in Jewish books outside of the Old Testament “messiah” came to be understood as a supernatural deliverer who would bring the End of the World and then reign on earth for a period of time before a new heaven and a new earth would be created.[12:591f.; 8:832]

Where there are heroes—such as Yahweh, his Messiah and angels—there must also be villains. In the post-biblical Jewish literature these latter were represented by Satan and his demons.[2:598] Commensurate with the End of the World, it was believed that there would have to be a cosmic battle between these forces of good and evil.

One of the great Jewish “soldiers” in that war was John the Baptist. He came out of the wilderness preaching a message of doom: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” [Mt. 3:2]

John’s most famous disciple was a man from Nazareth by the name of Jesus. When he began his own ministry, his message was identical to John’s: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” [Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:15] Over and over Jesus told his disciples to prepare for the imminent End of the World: “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power.” [Mk. 9:1] “This generation will not pass away before all these things take place. [But] heaven and earth will pass away...” [Mk. 13:30f.] He taught that the Kingdom of God had begun in his ministry, but that it would only be fulfilled in the future. [This is the dominant scholarly view.

2:600] Furthermore, he apparently taught that after his own death, he would return at the End of the World, much like the “Son of Man” described in the Old Testament’s book of Daniel (7:13-14).[16:166] This became the doctrine of the “Parousia,” or “Second Coming of Christ.”

Paul, the unknown evangelist who wrote “Mark” and many other New Testament writers adopted and adapted Jewish End-of-the-World beliefs and applied them to Jesus.[14:99-173; 177-256; 295-323] This was especially true of John, the author of the book of Revelation.[14:447-468]

For decades, the earliest New Testament Christians believed that the End of the World was imminent and that the Second Coming was about to happen. But, as time passed, the “Delay of the Parousia” became a scandal, and though Christianity never abandoned its belief in the Second Coming, already in the New Testament period it began to put off its expectation of the End of the World to the indefinite future.[14:126; 323-325; 377f.; 2:606f.; 16:168f.]

After the New Testament period, several Church theologians tried to keep hope alive for the End, the Parousia, and the Millennium.[8:833f.]

But already by 250 C.E. other theologians were attacking such doctrines and by 400 C.E. Augustine had rejected all literal belief in a Millennium[8:834] That has remained the position of Roman Catholicism and all mainstream Protestant denominations to this day, although various fundamentalist, evangelical, or charismatic sects and cults occasionally get worked up over such fantasies. [9:63, 70; 8:834]

As for the rest of us, this was the “good news” [“gospel”!] a decade ago: U.S. government officials declared (correctly for once): “The world won’t end on Jan. 1 with a Y2K-related computer crash” (because most computers had already been upgraded to avoid the problem).[1:A1, A6]

As for the “Millennium,” “bright” people already knew that the new millennium didn’t actually begin until 2001 anyway! As Eileen Mitchell said in her newspaper column: it’s only the “dim bulbs” who were worried about

the Millennium coming in 2000![11] [On calendar issues: Lacayo, 62, explains that our current calendar, set up by Dionysius Exiguus (“Dennis the Short”), a 6th c. Catholic monk, was off on Jesus’ birth, which was between 6-4 B.C.E., so that the “millennium” should be dated to somewhere around 1997—and we all missed it! Mitchell’s point is that our Western calendar starts with year 1, not 0, so that the 21st century and the 3rd millennium did not really begin until January 1, 2001!]

The next time you meet a religious fanatic wearing a sandwich board that declares the End of the World is at hand, perhaps you might quote him this, from Jesus: “Of that day and hour no one knows!” [Mt. 24:36]

If that’s not a good enough authority for him, then offer him this comment which comes from the highest authority most Americans recognize—a sports hero. None other than N.Y. Yankees legendary catcher, Yogi Berra, said: “It ain’t over, ’til it’s over!”[3:754] *Amen to that, Brother!*

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GOOD WITHOUT GOD by Greg Epstein, © 2009, HarperCollins Publishers, New York NY

IN *GOOD WITHOUT GOD*, Greg Epstein writes about how humanists can lead lives of purpose and compassion. As his title indicates, he shows that it is not necessary to believe in God in order to be good.

Epstein is Humanist chaplain at Harvard University. He says that tolerant, fair-minded people of all religions or none should be interested in how to be a good person and live well. We need to do more good work together and build something positive in this world.

What are the purposes we can choose? There is the need for love and companionship, the wish for happiness and to be all that you can be. Another value is being of service to one's fellow human beings and for dignity. There is a good discussion of these topics. Rights originate not from nature, from logic, from law; they come from human experience. A rights-based system comes from the realization of the injustices of the past. We should examine our behavior, he says, and work out a more realistic attitude about how to attain the things we want and whether they are really worth attaining.

A common misunderstanding of the scientific side of humanism is that we see people as entirely selfish. In fact, we have evolved the ability to help one another in many ways. Cognitive scientist Steven Pinker says that being good is "a feature of rationality itself. There are many reasons to be good beyond God. One is that people need community. The book tells us that we succeed best in life when we can count on reliable help from a wide range of individuals with a range of skills and talents, all of whom know us personally enough to treat us as their own when we are in need." We "win" if members of a group in which we belong win. "Humanism is the active choice that, whenever

possible, dignity gets priority. It means acknowledging and understanding our selfish genes precisely so that we can continue to evolve beyond them."

Epstein tells us that "whether it's a trivial mishap or a bloody war, we're programmed to believe that everything has a cause, and even when some things don't, we still want to believe they do, so we infer that something we can't see and can't understand caused them." This pattern of causal thinking is so deep-seated, it even outlasts the belief in a traditional God.

The modern world was built on habits that are not sustainable. The author believes that it is up to secular people to step forward and take leadership on the issues facing us.

He suggests that while "loving our religious neighbors, offering them friendship and steadfastness even when they offer us spite" is desirable. Interfaith cooperation on the big issues is called for. Epstein feels that working with the community is the heart of humanism. He discusses life cycle events (family events, holiday practices, etc.) can be observed in a humanistic way. Different kinds of humanistic organizations are discussed. I believe the discussions in this book can be very interesting and stimulating for anyone interested in humanism. Perhaps it will help people understand how to coexist with those of different kinds of beliefs.

REVIEWED BY ALBERT ESKENAZI, PHD

THE PLAGUE, by Albert Camus (1913-60), first published as *LA PESTE* 1947, here as translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert 1948
"SOME BOOKS," SAID ELIE WIESEL, "INVITE SORROW, others joy—some both." And here in *The Plague* we see what he meant. After a long life of steady reading, I can think of no book that better exemplifies his words, none that so wonderfully manages to be both entertaining and unbelievably enriching.

Like many great works of fiction, it is both a straightforward narrative and a subtle allegory: one may read it as one reads a poem—for the depth of its emotion and the thoughtful insights that give it its very special value.

It is difficult to do it justice, so beautiful its prose, so moving its message.

It tells an absorbing story of a terrible epidemic that descends upon a quite commonplace small city. (This city can readily be identified as the port city of Oran, in Algeria.) In great detail we see it spread before us—dry, dusty, without charm. Its climate combines seasons of unbelievable heat and aridity, its winters bring scourges of bitter winds. And there is no drama in its life, nothing to allure the traveler: "Treeless, glamourless, soulless—the town of Oran ends by seeming restful and, after a while, you go complacently to sleep there."

The restful sleep here is gradually disturbed by the appearance of rats coming out of their holes and hidden places. Swarms of rats emerge to die in the streets. The town is overrun with them, bringing with them the deadly plague. The whole population is prey to it, and for many months the city lives with death, quarantined by an anxious world. Enclosed, as it were, with its terrible enemy, it suffers especially from its isolation from all that it loves, as time goes on, with a debilitating absence of hope.

We come to see how an overwhelming catastrophe such as *The Plague* can affect the life of a town in general. More, we follow the lives of several interesting men, each quite different from the others. There is, for example, the stuffy, reserved magistrate M. Othon, with his mouse-like wife and his two children like obedient poodles. There is poor, lonely Joseph Grand, with his pitiful clerical job and his secret desire to write a perfectly-worded sentence. There is Rambert, the journalist from Paris who is trying frantically to escape to his beloved mistress. There is Tarrou, well-to-do and solitary, with his bitter passion against the death penalty, and his self-denying work with the sick as the epidemic widens and widens, and medical personnel fight it untiringly. There is Father Paneloux, devout and sensitive to the pain of others.

And most important of all is Dr. Rieux, the narrator, who labors without sparing himself as the ghastly

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BOOK TALK

Continued from p.8

course of *The Plague* claims more and more lives. Beneath his heavy fatigue and his apprehension, his frustrating efforts to alleviate suffering, lies his own secret pain: his own wife, far from the town, is in a hospital, gravely ill. She dies before the quarantine is lifted.

With Father Paneloux and Dr. Rieux we ponder the terrible, mysterious problem: how can a loving God allow such agony, such mental and physical pain, to be suffered by His own children? Father Paneloux undertakes to explain in a long, admonitory sermon to a large congregation: "If today *The Plague* is in your midst, that is because the hour has struck for taking thought. The just man need have no fear, but the evildoer has good cause to tremble ... Too long this world of ours has connived at evil, too long has it counted on God's forgiveness. ... Now you are learning your lesson, the lesson that was learned by Cain and his offspring, by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, by Job and Pharaoh, by all that hardened their hearts against Him."

But then M. Othon's little boy suffers the death-throes—with doctors and Father Paneoux we watch, sickened: "In the small face, rigid as a mask of grayish clay, slowly the lips parted and from them rose a long, incessant scream, hardly varying with his respiration, and filling the ward with a fierce, indignant protest, so little childish that it seemed like a collective voice issuing from all the sufferers there." As he leaves the room with the priest, Dr. Rieux, angry in his pain, says, "Ah, that child, anyhow, was innocent, and you know it!" When Paneoux says reproachfully that what they had witnessed was as unbearable to him as to Rieux, the doctor apologizes. Father Paneoux explains that "it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand."

Whereupon Rieux sums up the definitive statement made by the whole sad scene: "No, Father, I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture."

Eventually *The Plague* wears itself

out. Eventually, slowly life becomes worth living again in Oran. The quarantine is lifted, ships and trains come and go, and those separated so long from loved ones are reunited. The whole little city, in its glad relief, gives itself up to rejoicing and merrymaking.

The narrative ends with what I think is one of the most sadly beautiful—and tragically meaningful—statement to be found anywhere: "And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: *The Plague* bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests, that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks and bookshelves. and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.

REVIEWED BY ABIGAIL ANN MARTIN

FROM YOUR EDITOR—Dear Reader:
We invite your submissions to this continuing column. Simply E-mail your reviews to me. SEE PAGE 10.

The Significance of Relics

Continued from p. 4

This practice of direct sale of relics is no longer allowed, but they are, nonetheless, still a rich source of income for the church. Hordes of people will be viewing the Shroud of Turin, and they will contribute large amounts to the church in Turin. Also, people coming to see relics such as the shroud can energize a local economy and increase the importance and prestige of the city in which it resides.

For all these reasons the promotion of relics will continue in the Catholic Church. This practice reveals hypocrisy and dishonesty since many leaders of the church are well-versed in science and should appreciate the absurdity of many of the beliefs about relics. In Catholicism and other religions, the primary goal appears to be increasing power rather than finding truth.

The End of the World!

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Freethought Day at Disney

Saturday Oct 16: 5th Annual Freethought Day at Disney & Epcot

JOIN freethinkers, atheists, agnostics and humanists of all kinds on the third Saturday in October for a fun day at Walt Disney World in Orlando ... hosted by Humanist Family Network—Greater Tampa Region.

This is a social event open to anyone and everyone who wishes just to have a good time at what is billed as the Happiest Place on Earth.

When you come, wear lime green! That way we can identify you in the crowd. Any old lime green t-shirt will do, or you can order the official shirt at www.cafepress.com/ at cost.

The Humanist Family Network also has t-shirts for sale for this day—check out your preference.

For more information, go to <http://freethoughtdayatdisney.org/>

HAWCF ... Vision & Mission Statements A

The Following Vision and Mission Statements were approved by the membership on December 19, 2006:



Vision: HAWCF membership to grow to more than 100 active members by 2010. Media sources in Lakeland are aware that HAWCF exists. Non-Humanists begin to see Humanism, science, and secularism as an ethical, nonthreatening alternative to sectarian supernaturalism.

HAWCF has a committee structure of active members performing tasks related to our mission.

Mission:

1) Actively increase the public awareness of the Humanist, secular worldview as a rational alternative to views based upon supernaturalism.

2) Act as an informational, educational and social resource for members and others on all matters related to Humanistic, Rationalistic and Freethought ideas.

Definitions of Humanism

[From the website of *Humanist Network News*— Ed.]

Humanism is:

"...an appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural world and destiny of man, and also giving a grounding for morality... Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God." *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

"...a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values; especially: a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason." *Merriam Webster Dictionary*

"...a non-religious philosophy, based on liberal human values." *Little Oxford Dictionary*

"...seeking, without religion, the best in, and for, human beings." *Chambers Pocket Dictionary*

"A system of thought that centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth." *American Heritage Dictionary*

What do Humanists believe?

Humanists believe that life is a naturally occurring process in the universe, that humans and human consciousness evolved on earth in the same way as all other life on the planet, and that humans will share with all other life the same ultimate fate.

Humanists believe that the application of human reason and the scientific method are the best means for discovery of truth about the universe and ourselves. Humanists reject the notion that the application of intellect to all areas of human concern is in any sense vain or arrogant, and require that all claims to truth be supported by credible, verifiable evidence.

Humanists believe humanity alone is responsible for its own destiny. All values—spiritual, ethical and social—have their source in human experience, are products of evolving culture, and are subject to human critique and amendment. Humanists believe in the common moral decencies, including altruism, integrity, honesty, tolerance, compassion, and equal justice for all.

Humanists believe in individual liberty and responsibility, freedom of conscience and speech, and in free inquiry. They support separation of church and state, and are opposed to censorship.

Humanists believe each person has but one life to lead, here and now on this earth; each of us must make the most of it in terms of creative work and happiness, and by respect for and cooperation with others we can make this a better world.

LINKS: Central Florida Freethought

Atheists of Florida Inc.
AtheistsofFlorida.org
facebook.com/AtheistsofFlorida

Center for Inquiry Tampa Bay
CenterforInquiry.net/Tampa

Humanist Society of the Suncoast
(Pinellas County)
SuncoastHumanist.com
facebook.com/pages/Humanist-Society-of-the-Suncoast/

Orlando Freethinkers & Humanists
meetup.com/GotReason

Humanists of Sarasota Bay Area
(HUSBAY)
http://sarasota.humanists.net

Unitarian Universalist Congregation
of Lakeland (UUCL)
uuclakeland.org

Common Sense is the newsletter for members and friends of the Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF). Its purpose is to report information and opinions of interest to members.

Its articles are the opinion of the respective authors only and not necessarily of HAWCF, AHA or CSH.

Permission to reprint articles in this newsletter is granted to all Humanist/Freethought groups provided proper acknowledgement is given. All others write for permission.

Editor: Nan Owens

Associate Editor: Abigail Ann Martin

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What is HAWCF?

The Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF) is a chapter of the American Humanist Association dedicated to the promotion in our area of a rational worldview free from dependence upon supernatural belief systems.

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A chartered Chapter of the American Humanist Association and an Affiliate of the Council for Secular Humanism

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MEMBERSHIP

New Renewal

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I am interested in helping on the following activities

- Membership Recruit, welcome and orient new members to HAWCF
- Civic Action Promote Humanism within community and government
- Activities Develop and facilitate social activities for the membership.
- Programs Arrange/facilitate interesting programs for HAWCF meetings
- Hospitality Facilitate social, housekeeping and refreshment activities for HAWCF
- Education Develop/provide humanist educational & historical materials for HAWCF
- Newsletter Write for or edit HAWCF newsletter
- Publicity Publicize HAWCF and Humanist activities in the community

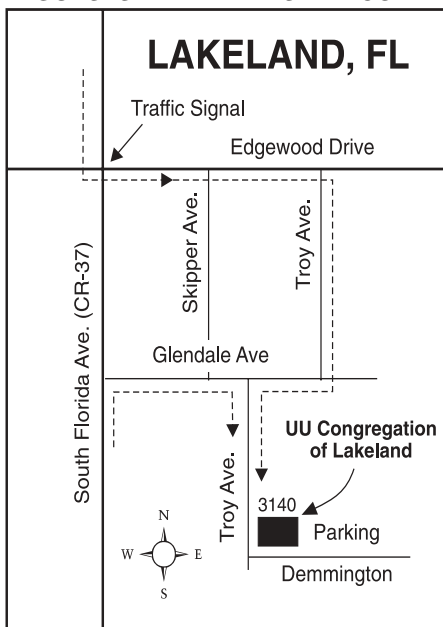
The Humanist Association of West Central Florida is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by federal and state law.

WHEN AND WHERE?

THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA usually meets on **the 3RD Tuesday of every month at 7 pm** (except July & August) at the UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF LAKELAND (UUCL), 3140 Troy Avenue, Lakeland.

See map below.

GUESTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!



HUMANIST DINNER!!

JUST A REMINDER: each month we usually hold an informal Humanist dinner gathering (except December).

WHEN:

The 2ND MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH at 6:15 pm.



WHERE:

Fred's Southern Market ...

located at 2124 Harden Boulevard in Lakeland (just south of Beacon Road on east side of the road). See Map below

PLEASE JOIN US...BRING YOUR FRIENDS!



THE RATIONALIST SERVICE MOVEMENT KNOWN AS SOS ...

Secular Organizations for Sobriety ... is now available in west central Florida.

SOS Tampa Bay is an alternative, science-based recovery method for alcoholics or drug addicts who are uncomfortable with the spirituality in 12-Step programs. Meetings are open at 7–8 pm every Wednesday at 3614 S Manhattan Avenue, Tampa. Dates and locations will be added to meet local need. Visit it online at <http://sostampabay.org> or you can check it out on Facebook.

In Cyber Space:

WEBSITE ADDRESS:

<http://hawcf.org>

BLOG ADDRESS:

www.humanistcommonsense.blogspot.com

Please visit each of our sites. Comments or suggestions on either site are earnestly desired and should be brought up at meetings or made directly to webmaster Ken Schmidt:

kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com

Note: this newsletter can be printed from our website with adobe acrobat reader.

September 2010

Inquiring Minds Want To Know...

Should Freedom of Religion allow the church to direct the state?

What have we learned about fusing religion and government? What about present-day religious governments?

Join us to view and discuss *God in Government!*

See inside for exciting news.



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